



ASSAULT ON NOCTURNE KEEP

A HEIST ONE-SHOT WITH A TWIST

HOMEBREW

5e compatible level 5 one-shot

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Valtor looked at the dead body of the thief. *"Got almost half way - that's further than anyone in the past two decades."* Turning to Radnor, his captain of the guard, he growled, *"This is not acceptable. I want a plan for revamped security measures in my hands by morning. And it better be airtight."* Radnor, his face drained of blood, simply nodded in acknowledgment. *"Go get the Master of Secrets... I have an idea..."*

MODULE INTRO

Assault on Nocturne Keep is a **level 5 adventure** billed as an **all-evil one-shot heist**. However, there are two **twists**:

1. The client, the **enigmatic sorcerer Morag**, who hires the PCs to steal the **Heart of Shadows** from the **powerful tyrant's impenetrable fortress**, is actually Valtor, said tyrant himself in disguise. He is using the players to **"red team"** his new security measures.
2. The players are all **only pretending to be evil** — each has a **secret good motivation**. The players will be aware of this, but their characters will not be.

ADVENTURE SUMMARY

VALTOR'S RISE TO POWER

Valtor, once a cunning and ambitious sorcerer, began his ascent to power through ruthless manipulation and strategic alliances. His thirst for power was insatiable, and he quickly realized that brute strength alone would not be enough to dominate the land. He delved into forbidden magics and sought out powerful artifacts to augment his abilities.

THE HEART OF NOCTIS

The most significant find was the Heart of Noctis, a relic of immense power. It granted Valtor unparalleled magical abilities, allowing him to control and manipulate reality, instill fear in his enemies, and fortify his stronghold, Nocturne Keep, with nearly impenetrable defenses.

With the Heart of Noctis, Valtor quickly overpowered rival factions and brought the region under his iron-fisted rule. His enemies were either crushed or forced into submission, and those who opposed him faced a grim fate. Valtor's reign of terror was bolstered by the artifact, which not only enhanced his personal power but also spread a pervasive aura of dread throughout **Eldoria**. This was 70 years ago...

THE MISSION

Power can breed complacency, which leads to catastrophe. To avoid this, Valtor continually seeks ways to strengthen his defenses and anticipate threats. Recognizing that even the most formidable fortresses can have vulnerabilities, he devises a cunning plan to test and improve his security measures.

Disguising himself as an enigmatic sorcerer named **Morag**, he hires groups of mercenaries and adventurers to infiltrate Nocturne Keep. His goal is to use these unwitting operatives to "red team" his defenses, exposing any weaknesses and allowing him to refine his security protocols.

BAND OF SCUM AND VILLAINY

Valtor sets his Master of Secrets to gather the most tough, no-good, vicious, conniving, ruthless, devious, merciless, and cunning villains around. Unfortunately for him they are **not as evil as they appear to be**. They all have their own **secret motivations** (see Secret Motivation Section) - though they don't know about each other, and assume they have to keep their cover.

Gathering them together as Morag, he lays out the plan: they will each be paid 10k gold if they can get him the Heart of Noctis.

SAMPLE ADVERTISING MESSAGE

Assault on Nocturne Keep - a **Level 5 one/two-shot** adventure.

THE SETTING

The evil sorcerer **Valtor** has ruled **Eldoria** with an iron fist for 70 years. He was able to achieve this through the power afforded to him by the **Heart of Noctis**, a powerful artifact stored in the bowels of **Nocturne Keep**, Valtor's stronghold - located in the capital city of **Tenebris**.

THE MISSION

A mysterious figure named **Morag** is putting together a squad of the most notorious criminals, thugs, and villains to heist the Heart. Think **Suicide Squad** meets **Assault on Precinct 13**.

THE TWIST

Each of your characters is **not actually evil** - they will all have secret motivations assigned to them. Your characters will not know the motivations of the others in the party.

CHARACTER CREATION

Ask the players to share their ancestry, class, and subclass ideas before creating their characters. Once you have this information, choose a **secret motivation** and **boon/item** for each player. As the game progresses, your characters may start guessing at the motivations of others, which should provide some fun roleplaying opportunities.

Characters should be **level 5**. It's highly recommended to let each character have one uncommon item and a healing potion.

CHARACTER MOTIVATIONS

Choose (or roll for) motivations for your players. If you prefer, you can choose multiple motivations (or one from the factions and one solo) and present each player with a choice.

FACTION SECRET MOTIVATIONS

#	Faction	Description	Secret Motivation
1	The Iron Resistance	A group of rebels formed by disillusioned citizens, former soldiers, and ex-slaves united under a common goal.	To incite a rebellion within the city, weaken Valtor's forces, and ultimately bring about his downfall.
2	The Purifiers Allied with The Lightbringers Opposed by The Shadow Veil	A religious order devoted to cleansing the land of corruption and restoring its natural beauty and balance.	They believe they can purify the Heart of Noctis and use it to heal the land blighted by Valtor's magic, and restore Eldoria's natural order.
3	The House of Dawn Opposed by The Zhentarim.	A noble family with a long history of leadership and governance, now in hiding due to Valtor's rise to power.	To reclaim their rightful place as rulers, restore peace and order, and end Valtor's tyrannical rule. They wish to capture Valtor alive to stand trial for his crimes.
4	The Green Cloaks	A circle of druids and rangers dedicated to protecting the natural world from any and all threats.	To stop the spread of Valtor's corrupting influence on the land and ensure the preservation of natural habitats.
5	The Zhentarim Opposed by House of Dawn	A powerful and influential foreign syndicate with interests in trade, espionage, and conquest.	To destabilize Valtor's rule and establish a foothold in his territory, potentially taking control themselves.
6	The Shadow Veil Opposed by The Purifiers	A secretive organization working to dismantle dark magic and eliminate those who practice it.	To destroy the Heart of Noctis as it's too dangerous to exist.
7	The Lightbringers Allied with The Purifiers	A group of paladins and clerics on a holy mission to vanquish evil and spread the light of their deity.	To cleanse the land of Valtor's evil and restore divine order and light.
10	The Whispering Blades	A clandestine guild of master thieves who once thrived under Valtor's rule, only to be performatively dismantled and imprisoned by him to demonstrate his "tough on crime" stance.	To exact revenge on Valtor for his betrayal and to loot Nocturne Keep of its treasures to rebuild their guild.

SOLO SECRET MOTIVATIONS

#	Solo Character	Description	Secret Motivation
1	The Redeemer	A former mercenary who once served as an enforcer for Valtor.	You seek to atone for past crimes by performing heroic deeds and saving those oppressed by Valtor.
2	The Avenger	Your family was slaughtered by Valtor's forces. Only thing keeping you alive is revenge.	You aim to avenge the death of your loved ones by eliminating Valtor and his enforcers.
3	The Liberator	An escaped slave who endured years of suffering under Valtor's regime.	You strive to liberate the enslaved and dismantle the oppressive systems Valtor has put in place.
4	The Healer	A medic whose village was destroyed by Valtor's forces.	You seek to bring relief and restoration to those affected by Valtor's cruelty and the land's corruption by wielding the Heart of Noctis.
5	The Seeker	A treasure hunter who initially sought the Heart of Noctis for wealth.	You aim to prevent the Heart of Noctis from being misused and to ensure it doesn't fall into the wrong hands.
6	The Scholar	A historian who has uncovered the true origins of the Heart of Noctis.	You seek to study the artifact and prevent its power from causing further destruction.
7	The Defector	A former officer in Valtor's army who has seen too many atrocities.	You aim to undermine Valtor's rule from within by gathering intelligence and aiding the rebellion.
8	The Reformer	A former advisor to Valtor who believes he can be redeemed and his power used for good.	You seek to capture Valtor and persuade him to use the Heart of Noctis to undo the harm he has caused. You believe he can be turned from a tyrant to a benevolent ruler.

SPECIAL BOONS AND ITEMS

Along with the motivations, choose an appropriate boon or item to grant to each player (or create your own).

Name	Description
Arcane Grenade	A magical explosive device that disrupts the Heart's resonance with Valtor. Once per day, a PC can throw this grenade as an action, requiring a DC 12 Arcana check to disable Valtor's Villain Action for one turn. <i>Lore: Crafted by the ancient archmages of Eldoria, this grenade pulses with raw arcane energy, designed to sever the bond between the Heart and its wielder.</i>
Sacred Prayer	A special prayer that blesses the area, granting the effects of the Bless spell (without requiring concentration) to all allies against the wielder of the Heart of Noctis. <i>Lore: This prayer, passed down through generations of clerics, calls upon the divine to protect the faithful and weaken the forces of darkness.</i>
Heartstrike Weapon	An ancient weapon created as a twin to the Heart of Noctis. This weapon deals an additional 2d6 radiant damage to Valtor on a hit. The blade ignores Valtor's resistances. <i>Lore: Forged in the same fires as the Heart of Noctis, this weapon was intended to be its counterbalance, capable of piercing even the strongest magical defenses.</i>
Arcane Ward	A special ability to nullify Valtor's Arcane Smite. When Valtor is hit with a melee attack that would trigger his Arcane Smite, a PC can use their reaction to create a magical ward, nullifying the additional damage and effects of the Arcane Smite for that attack. This ability can be used once. <i>Lore: This ward, inscribed with runes of protection, was designed by the first guardians of Eldoria to shield against the most potent magical assaults.</i>
Shattering Strike	A powerful strike that can damage Valtor's armor, making him more vulnerable. A PC can perform a Shattering Strike using a weapon. On a hit, Valtor's armor is damaged, reducing his AC by 3 and removing his arcane armor bonus. <i>Lore: This technique, perfected by legendary warriors, channels brute force into a single, armor-shattering blow.</i>
True Name Revelation	Research has discovered Valtor's true name - Calder Blackstone . Speaking Valtor's true name in his presence forces him to make a DC 16 Wisdom saving throw. On a failure, he is stunned for 1 round. This ability can only be used once. <i>Lore: Hidden in ancient texts and whispered in forgotten legends, Valtor's true name holds the key to shattering his formidable will.</i>

DM Note: "True Name Revelation" is a particularly powerful boon, so consider providing it only to a party with four or fewer players.

RECRUITMENT

THE PITCH

Whether you heard from your underground contact, overheard someone talking in a tavern, or received a mysterious note, you find yourself in a private room in one of the finest dining establishments, surrounded by unfamiliar faces. The hooded figure before you makes a few movements with their hands while muttering under their breath—you feel something change in the room. Lowering their hood, they finally speak, *“Now we can speak freely—we cannot be listened in on, nor scried upon—not even by Valtor himself.”*

“Thank you all for coming. My name is Morag—though I’d appreciate it if my name never leaves your lips outside this room. Each of you is the best at what you do—whether it’s thievery, deception, or sheer ruthlessness, your skills are unmatched. That’s precisely why I’ve summoned you here.”

Morag, assuming that’s his real name, is a fairly nondescript human man. He paces, looking at each of you in turn.

“I’m going to get straight to it—I need you all to get into Nocturne Keep and retrieve the Heart of Noctis. Succeed, and you will each be rewarded with ten thousand gold pieces. Questions?”

DM Note: Players may try getting fresh with Morag - he ignores any insults. If they try to get physical, you can try casting hold person, or have him teleport, avoiding the attacks.

Q & A

If the following questions are not asked, Morag will volunteer this information:

- **How do we get in?** *“There is a secret entrance to bypass the guards—after that, I have no knowledge of the defenses. But there will be defenses. The entrance is through a cellar of an abandoned house next to the keep.”*
- **What do you need the Heart for?** *“That’s my business. If the ten thousand gold pieces are not enough for you, or if you’re scared, you can back out now.”*
- **Can we use teleportation to get in or out?** *“No, teleportation is forbidden into and out of the keep. You’ll have to rely on more conventional means.”*
- **How do we contact you once we have the Heart?** *“I will know when you have succeeded. Return to this location, and I will find you.”*

Other questions and answers:

- **What if we are caught?** *“Don’t...”*
- **Who else knows about this mission?** *“Only those in this room. Discretion is key.”*
- **What kind of defenses can we expect?** *“The usual for a fortress of this nature—traps, guards, possibly magical wards. Be prepared for anything.”*
- **What happens if we fail?** *“Let’s just say failure is not an option if you value your lives.”*
- **Can we trust you to pay us?** *“I have more to lose by crossing you than you do by crossing me. You will be paid. I am advancing each of you one hundred platinum pieces now.”* The players are handed coin purses with platinum coins bearing the visage of Valtor.
- **Is there a time limit?** *“The sooner, the better, but there is no strict deadline. Speed is in your best interest.”*
- **What resources will we have?** *“You have your skills and what you can carry. Plan accordingly.”*
- **What does the Heart look like?** *“A dark crystal, pulsing with an eerie glow. You will know it when you see it.”*
- **What if someone else tries to take the Heart?** *“Eliminate any competition. The Heart must come to me.”*
- **Is there any additional information we should know?** *“Stay sharp and trust no one outside this room. Good luck.”*
- **Is the Heart dangerous?** *“Not on its own, it must be wielded.”*
- **What if we find other valuable items?** *“The Heart is your priority. Anything else you find is yours to keep, as long as it doesn’t compromise the mission.”*
- **What if we need to retreat?** *“Failure is not an option. Plan your escape routes, but remember, success is the only acceptable outcome.”*

OFF YOU GO...

If the party continues talking, and the DM decides they have all the needed information, Morag simply says, *“You have your mission...”* and teleports out of the room. The party will need to head through the city to get to the keep. They may choose to shop—there are regular merchants, and if they want anything illicit, use the “Thieves’ Market” encounter below.

CITY ENCOUNTERS

Choose one or more of these encounters as the party moves through the city to get to the keep. The players may decide how to react and whether to keep their cover. Provided are some possible NPC names in case the players ask. Feel free to adjust/add/remove NPCs.

INNOCENTS IN PERIL

As the players make their way through the bustling market square, the sounds of merchants hawking their wares and the chatter of townsfolk are suddenly drowned out by the shouts of Valtor's soldiers. A group of townsfolk—an elderly couple, a merchant, and his assistant, a timid teenager—are being harassed by three heavily armed soldiers. The soldiers, their faces twisted with arrogance and cruelty, demand exorbitant taxes and threaten violence if their demands are not met.

The market square falls silent as onlookers nervously glance at the scene, afraid to intervene. The elderly couple trembles, and the merchant's eyes dart around, searching for a way to escape. The teenager looks on helplessly, fear etched on their face. The soldiers push and shove, their threats growing more menacing.

- Elderly Couple: Bartholomew and Edna
- Merchant: Lucas
- Assistant: Rina
- Soldiers: Captain Garrick, Private Thorne, Private Vel

THIEVES' MARKET

While exploring a maze of narrow alleyways, the players come across a hidden entrance leading to an underground market. Inside, the Thieves' Market is a bustling hub of activity where stolen goods, contraband, and illicit items are sold. Vendors hawk their wares in hushed tones, and shadowy figures lurk in the corners, keeping an eye out for potential threats or opportunities. The air is thick with the scent of exotic spices and the sound of whispered deals.

- Market Leader: Shade
- Vendor: Malik
- Informant: Whisper

STREET DUEL

In the heart of the city, the players come upon a crowd gathered around two hot-headed individuals, weapons drawn and eyes locked in a deadly stare. The tension is palpable as the duelists prepare to engage in combat, each believing they have been grievously wronged. The crowd murmurs in anticipation, placing bets on who will emerge victorious. The duelists, oblivious to the onlookers, are moments away from clashing steel.

- Duelists: Hector and Alaric
- Betting Leader: Rook

MERCHANT SCAM

At a bustling market stall, a shady merchant loudly advertises “rare and powerful magical items” at suspiciously low prices. As the players approach, they witness a customer growing increasingly agitated, claiming that the item they purchased is a counterfeit. The merchant, slick and evasive, denies any wrongdoing and insists that the customer simply doesn't know how to use the item properly. The tension escalates as more onlookers gather, curious about the commotion.

- Shady Merchant: Tobias
- Agitated Customer: Felicity

FLEEING SPY

A disheveled man or woman suddenly dashes into the players' path, pursued by several heavily armed guards. The spy, panting and desperate, begs the players for help, claiming to have vital information that could change the fate of the city. The guards shout for the players to stand aside, declaring the spy a dangerous criminal. The spy's eyes dart around, seeking any possible escape route as the guards close in.

- Spy: Lyra
- Guards: Sergeant Davos, Private Lyn, Private Garth

POLITICAL PROPAGANDA

As the players navigate the bustling streets of Tenebris, they encounter a group fervently distributing political pamphlets and shouting slogans in support of Valtor's regime. The propaganda paints a glorified picture of Valtor, depicting him as a benevolent ruler who brings order and prosperity to Eldoria. The crowd is divided—some citizens eagerly accept the pamphlets, while others angrily reject them.

- Propagandist Leader: Seraphine

RUNAWAY SLAVE COUPLE

In a shadowy alley, the players come across a frightened couple hiding from patrols. The two runaway slaves beg for help to escape the city and gain their freedom. They are being pursued by ruthless slave catchers, who are not officially part of the city guard but are authorized to capture escaped slaves. Helping the couple would be a morally right action, but it also risks exposing the players to the slave catchers and jeopardizing their own mission.

- Runaway Slaves: Jorin and Leena
- Slave Catchers: Cormac, Darius, and Hram

If your players get into combat use Guard (MM p347) or Bandit (MM p343) statblocks

ILLEGAL ALCHEMIST

An alchemist operates out of a dingy shop in a back alley, selling dangerous, untested potions with unpredictable side effects. Known to be slightly crazy, he rambles about his genius while peddling his concoctions to anyone willing to buy. While many view him as a charlatan preying on the desperate, others see him as a last resort for those who cannot afford traditional medicine. The alchemist's potions range from dubious cures to potent poisons, and his clientele includes both the desperate and the unscrupulous. The players can buy potions from him, risking unpredictable outcomes (see Alchemist's Wares), ignore him, or decide to shut down his operation, potentially depriving the needy of their only source of medicine.

- Alchemist: Dr. Mordred Blackflask

ALCHEMIST'S WARES

If the players choose to purchase some of the potions, let them choose only one per person (*"I would not combine these... bad things will happen."*). Give them the "Seller's Description" until they use them, at which point give them the full effect.

#	Name	Effect Description
1	Reckless Fury	[Primary Melee Classes] Every melee attack is treated as reckless (attack is rolled with Advantage, but any attack against the player is rolled with Advantage as well until their turn).
2	Luck be a lady tonight	Grants inspiration to the player, and GM gets to force disadvantage at a time of their choosing.
3	Unstable Teleport	Gain the ability to cast the Misty Step spell at will. Roll 1d20 for uncertain destination, appearing in a location of DM's choice on 1-10.
4	Size Shift	Changes creature size from Medium to Small. No effect on Small creatures.
5	Spell Rejuvenation	[Primary Spellcaster Classes] Restores one highest level spent spell slot but causes one level of exhaustion.
6	Speed Surge	Doubles speed but causes jitteriness, disadvantage on Dexterity checks and saves.
7	Painful Retaliation	As an Action you can choose to harm a creature at will, causing 2d10+3 psychic damage, but take half the damage yourself.
8	Statue Defense	As a reaction to taking damage, you can choose to become an invulnerable statue to negate the triggering damage. You are invulnerable and petrified until the end of your next turn.
9	Charge of the Boar	Gain a powerful charge attack: If you can move at least 10ft in a straight line, you can make an attack. If the attack hits, it is treated as a critical hit, and the target is knocked prone. If the attack misses, the player takes 1d10+3 bludgeoning damage, is knocked prone, and lands 10 feet past the target.
10	Clumsy Might	Advantage on Strength checks and saves but disadvantage on Dexterity-based tasks.

DR. MORDRED BLACKFLASK'S ELIXIRIUM

- **Reckless Fury** This one will make you fight like a demon possessed
- **Luck be a lady tonight** Drink this and fortune will smile upon you... mostly
- **Unstable Teleport** A sip of this, and you'll be here, there, and everywhere
- **Size Shift** You'll fit where no one else can
- **Spell Rejuvenation** Restores your magical prowess, but at a cost
- **Speed Surge** Run like the wind, but mind your footing
- **Painful Retaliation** Hurt your foes, but beware, it bites back
- **Statue Defense** Turn to stone and become invincible, if only for a moment
- **Charge of the Boar** Charge forth with the power of a raging beast
- **Clumsy Might** You'll be as strong as a bull in a china shop

Dr. Mordred Blackflash's Elixirium

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• **Size Shift** You'll fit where no one else can

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Charge of the Boar Charge forth with the power of a raging beast

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NOCTURNE KEEP

SECRET ENTRANCE

The secret entrance to Nocturne Keep is hidden in the cellar of an abandoned house on the outskirts of Tenebris. Inside, a dusty staircase leads to a trapdoor beneath rotting crates, revealing a narrow, stone tunnel. The air is damp, with moss-covered bricks and the occasional drip of water. Flickering torches provide dim light, and the tunnels are eerily silent except for distant skittering. After navigating twists and turns, the tunnel opens into a larger, fortified passage, signaling the approach to Nocturne Keep's inner defenses.

DM Note: If you have a character that understands Thieves' Cant, this would be a perfect place to leave a clue about one of the early traps or enemies. Even if this trivializes that encounter, it will make them feel great, and there is plenty of danger left.

If there is no one who understands it, you can describe that there are mysterious symbols scratched on the wall. Don't let the players spend too much time on them.

The passage leads to a set of stairs leading down...

GENERAL FEATURES

Unless otherwise specified:

- The walls, floor, and ceiling are made of stone.
- The ceilings are 10 feet tall.
- Doors are reinforced wood, locked, and open inward. DC14 Thieves' tools check or DC18 Strength check (may alert guards).
- Everburning torches provide illumination.

1 - ENTRANCE

The stairs descend into a circular room. The room is empty, save for a few loose bricks and an empty rotting crate. An alcove to the west quickly reveals a secret door (no check necessary).

2 - PILLARED HALL

The secret door opens into another circular room, this one much larger and filled with evenly spaced stone pillars. The ceiling here rises to 20 feet, giving the room an imposing atmosphere. Each **pillar has carvings of various monstrous creatures** (feel free to forshadow enemies). The eyes of these carvings seem to follow the players as they move through the room, creating a sense of being watched.

DM Note: This room is designed to lull the players into a false sense of security after they realize that nothing harmful happens here, making them more vulnerable to real threats later on.

Let the players spend a few minutes here, but don't let them waste too much time.

RED HERRINGS:

- **Faint Whispering:** Characters with a high perception may hear faint whispering coming from the pillars. This is merely an enchantment meant to unsettle intruders.
- **Arcane Symbols:** The runes and symbols on the pillars seem to hint at traps or magical defenses, but they are purely decorative and inactive.
- **Pressure Plates:** Several floor tiles appear to be pressure plates, but stepping on them produces no effect. They are decoys meant to waste the party's time.

3 - FOYER

A large square room with several exits.

- **To the west:** Stairs lead up, with flickering light and faint sounds of talking guards (MM p347).
- **To the south:** A door leading to area 5.
- **To the east:** A portcullis leading to a corridor. A lever is mounted on the wall near the portcullis.

DANGERS:

- **The Lever:** Pulling the lever does not open the portcullis; it activates an alarm instead. The portcullis can be opened simply by pulling it up, no check needed. A DC14 Investigation check will reveal the true nature of the lever.
- **Noise:** Making any noise in this room will attract the four guards. If the alarm has not been sounded yet, one of the guards will attempt to flip the lever. **This includes rooms 4 & 5 to a lesser degree. Keep an eye out on players using particularly loud spells.**
- **Shift Change:** If the guards are killed or disabled without triggering the alarm, a shift change will occur roughly midway through the adventure or at the end of the first short rest, during which the alarm will be sounded.
- **Alarm Consequences:** If the alarm is triggered, roll a 1d4 in every subsequent room. On a 1, 1d6+2 guards will attack the party. This will also preclude the party from taking any short rests.

4 - SHADOWY SANCTUM

Past the portcullis, the corridor turns the corner and opens up into a square room, with another corridor leading north. Unlike the other rooms, this one is not lit by torches, though there are some torches further down the corridor.

Danger: When anyone reaches the middle of the room, four Shadows (MM p269) coalesce from the corners and attack.

4A – PIT TRAP

The intersection of corridors in front of Room 6 contains a pit trap.

TRAP DETAILS:

- **Detection:** DC16 Perception check to notice.
- **Avoidance:** DC20 Dexterity check to avoid.
- **Damage:** Falling into the spiked pit deals 2d6 bludgeoning damage from the fall and 1d6 piercing damage from the spikes at the bottom.
- **Poison:** Players must pass a DC12 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned for one hour.

5 – ANIMATED ARMOR ASSAULT

This rectangular room is lined with pillars, and a set of double doors leads to the north. Each corner contains a decorative suit of armor, with the set in the southeast corner being particularly ornate.

Danger: If the players attack the suits of armor or attempt to open the doors, the suits animate. The Animated Armor (MM p19) fights in a straightforward manner, while the Helmed Horror (MM p183) is more cunning, targeting weaker characters and spellcasters first.

6 / 6A – OBVIOUS SECRET?

This square room features three visible doors: one to the north, one to the east, and one to the south. The walls are adorned with faded tapestries depicting scenes of long-forgotten battles.

SECRET DOOR:

There is a subtle hint that a secret door exists on the west wall. Players can notice a tapestry on the west wall hangs slightly differently compared to the others.

DETECTION:

- **Perception Check:** DC10 Perception check to notice the oddly hanging tapestry, revealing the secret door to the west.

BEYOND THE SECRET DOOR:

Upon opening the secret door, the players will see a plinth with what appears to be the Heart of Noctis resting on it. The Heart is a dark crystal, pulsing with an eerie glow, giving off a faint sense of dread. However, the heart and the plinth is actually a Mimic (MM p220) and will attack the players if they get within 5 feet. The first attack should be made with Advantage, assuming the players have not figured out the trap.

7 – MORE RED HERRINGS

This long rectangular room has doors to the south and west.

DISTRACTIONS:

- **Perception Check:** A DC10 Perception check reveals slightly different colored tiles on the floor. The tiles themselves are inert, serving only as a distraction and time waster.

TRAP:

- The open entrance into Room 8 is trapped with a scythe trap. A DC18 Perception check is required to notice the trap. Triggering the trap deals 2d10+5 slashing damage, halved on a successful DC14 Dexterity saving throw.

8 – HIDDEN PRESSURE TRAPS

This room has more of the discolored tiles seen in the previous room.

DISTRACTIONS:

- **Perception Check:** A DC10 Perception check reveals more of the slightly different colored tiles on the floor, serving as a distraction.

REAL TRAPS:

- **Detection:** The real pressure traps can only be detected with a DC18 Perception check. Barring someone finding them, anyone who makes it 15 feet into the room must make a DC14 Dexterity saving throw or take 1d6+3 piercing damage from an arrow trap.
- **Trigger Mechanism:** The traps trigger every 15 feet of movement unless the characters find them with a DC14 Investigation check.
- **Avoidance:** Characters can also avoid the traps by falling prone and crawling, as the arrows fly at roughly 3 feet in height.

9 – POISONOUS PASSAGE

This room has small tubes roughly every 5 feet on the ceiling which can be noticed with a DC14 Perception check

TRAP ACTIVATION:

- The tubes are inert until someone passes the middle of the room (marked on the map). At that point, the room starts filling with gas, starting from the south, west, and east, driving the players toward the north (toward the pit trap in Room 11).
- The gas advances at a rate of 10 feet per turn.
- Anyone in the gas takes 1d6 poison damage per turn, unless they don't breathe. Covering their mouth and nose halves the damage.

10 - GRUESOME GAZE

This large rectangular room has doors to the west and north.

TRAP ACTIVATION:

- Opening the north door and crossing the threshold activates a spiked log trap. The players make a DC14 Dexterity saving throw. On a failed save, the trap deals 1d8 bludgeoning damage and 1d8 piercing damage, with no damage dealt on success. The trap is then rendered inert.

ADDITIONAL DANGER:

- Once at least two people are in the room, a part of the ceiling in the center opens up, and a very pissed off Basilisk (MM p24) drops into the room.

11 - PITFALL PERIL

This rectangular room has a door to the east, and openings to the north and west.

PIT TRAP:

- The opening to the west conceals a pit trap. A DC14 Perception check to detect, rolled with disadvantage if running from the gas in Room 9. Falling into the pit deals 2d6 bludgeoning damage.

NASTY SURPRISE

At the bottom of the pit is a Specter (MM p279).

ADDITIONAL DANGER:

- The room also contains a Wight (MM p300) who floats in from Room 12.

12 - THE FINAL CONFRONTATION

A large circular room ringed by pillars. In the middle of the room is a large conference table. Seated at the table is Morag. There are also chairs for each of the players, with what appear to be coin purses on the table by each chair. The door to the south is made out of dark reinforced wood with glowing arcane symbols and chains crisscrossing it.

MORAG/VALTOR'S MONOLOGUE:

Morag claps slowly. "Good job... very good job. I honestly was not sure you would be able to do it, but here we are." He nods for you all to sit down. "The money is right there."

He fixes each of you with a gaze. "You all now work for me. We start now - these defenses all need to be revamped and you will help me do this."

It's likely the players will start popping off at this point or asking what's going on.

Morag's face and figure change into the face you have seen on the coins you were paid with. Valtor growls out "You should be grateful I'm not playing you all right now

- but I am a magnanimous ruler. And I appreciate talent. I wanted to test the defenses of my Keep and found them lacking. You will join my guard and help me fortify this place."

Unless the players agree (unlikely), combat begins.

Valtor gets up and seems to gather energy from some external source - the Heart of Noctis, you would assume. His eyes flash a deep red.

Roll initiative...



VALTOR, THE TYRANT

Medium humanoid (human), neutral evil

Armor Class 20 (Arcane Plate Armor) | 17 if Shattered

Hit Points 199 (22d8 + 100)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	14 (+2)	18 (+4)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	18 (+4)

Saving Throws Con +8, Cha +8

Skills Arcana +5, Intimidation +8, Perception +6

Damage Resistances Cold, Fire, Lightning

Condition Immunities Charmed, Frightened

Senses Darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 16

Languages Common, Draconic, Infernal

Challenge 10 (5,900 XP)

Magic Resistance. Valtor has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Arcane Resilience. At the start of his turn, Valtor can choose to end one effect on himself. This can include one spell or condition currently affecting him.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Valtor makes two attacks either with Arcane Blast or his Greatsword.

Greatsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 12 (2d6 + 5) slashing damage plus 9 (2d8) cold, fire, or lightning damage (Valtor's choice).

Arcane Blast. *Ranged Spell Attack:* +8 to hit, range 120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 18 (4d8) force damage.

Arcane Smite (Recharge 6). When Valtor hits a creature with a melee weapon attack, he can deal an extra 13 (3d8) force

damage to the target, and the target must succeed on a DC 16 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.

REACTIONS

Shield (1/Day). Valtor can cast *Shield* in response to being hit by an attack or targeted by the magic missile spell.

Misty Step (1/Day). When Valtor is targeted by an attack, he can use his reaction to teleport up to 30 feet to an unoccupied space he can see.

Counterspell (1/Day). When a creature within 60 feet of Valtor casts a spell, Valtor can use his reaction to attempt to interrupt the creature's spellcasting.

Absorb Elements (1/Day). When Valtor takes acid, cold, fire, lightning, or thunder damage, he can use his reaction to halve the damage and store the energy in his greatsword. The next time he hits with a melee attack, the stored energy is released, dealing an extra 2d6 damage of the absorbed type.

VILLAIN ACTIONS

Villain actions occur on initiative count 20 (losing ties). Each round, Valtor can use the following actions:

Round 1: Elemental Burst. Valtor releases a burst of elemental energy. Each creature within 20 feet of him must make a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw, taking 18 (4d8) cold, fire, or lightning damage (Valtor's choice) on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Round 2: Dark Empowerment. Valtor draws power from the Heart of Noctis, gaining 30 temporary hit points. He also gains advantage on all attack rolls until the start of his next turn.

Round 3: Arcane Overload. Valtor releases a surge of magical energy. Each creature within 20 feet of him must make a DC 16 Strength saving throw. On a failed save, a creature takes 22 (4d10) force damage and is pushed 10 feet away from Valtor. On a successful save, the creature takes half as much damage and isn't pushed.

DM Note: If your party is particularly strong and/or lucky, you can have a few Veteran (MM p. 350) guards join the fray. You can also tweak Valtor's HP on the fly. HP should be around 100+25 per character.

TACTICS

Initially, Valtor fights multiple PCs, still hoping to cow them into submission. When it becomes clear there is real danger to him (especially once some of the boons or items are used), he will try to take down the most dangerous-seeming foe.

RUNNING THE FIGHT

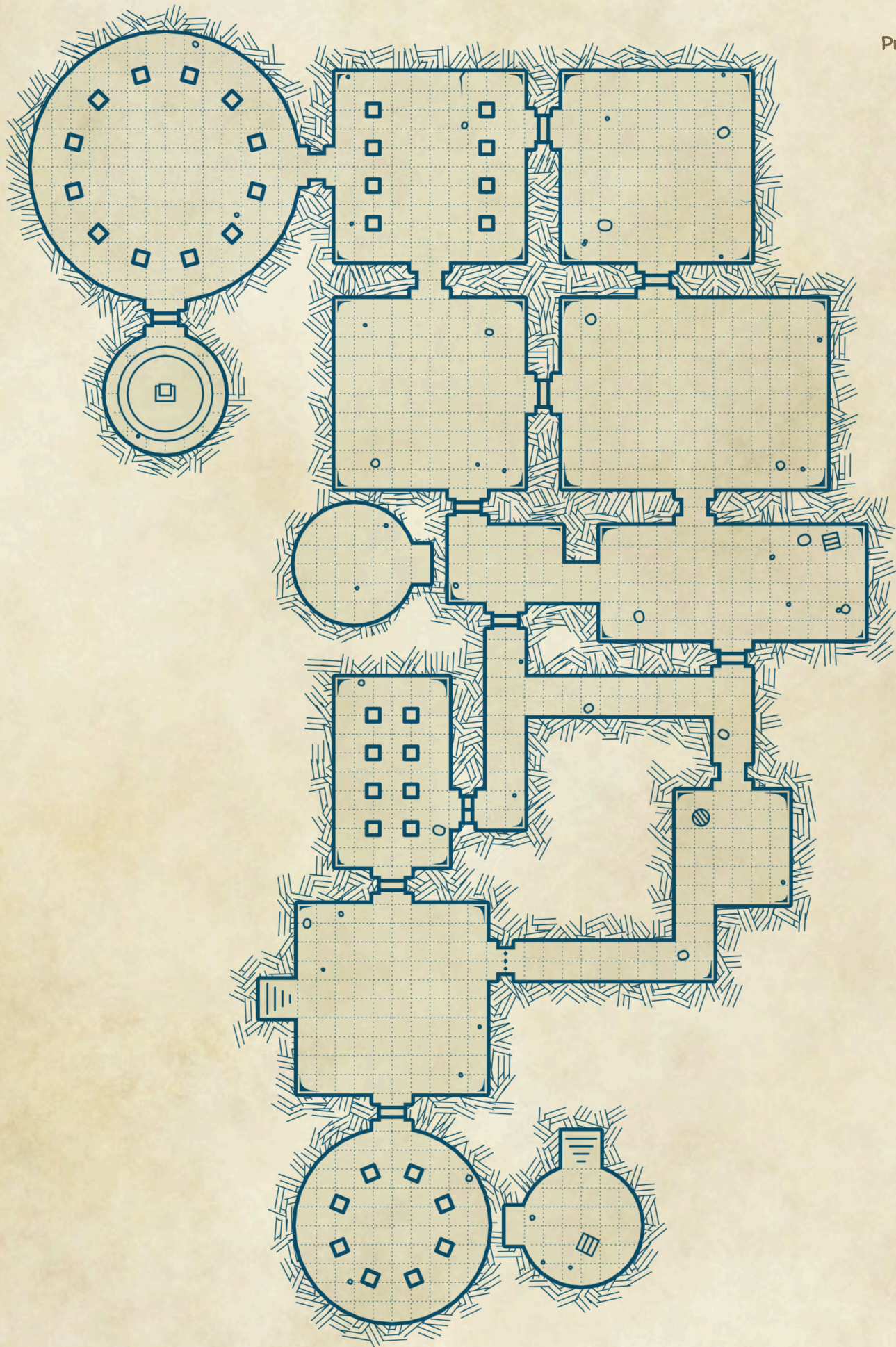
- Add Villain Actions to the Initiative Tracker. If Valtor and Villain Actions don't have any PCs between them in the initiative, move the Villain Actions to below the next PC in order.
- Make sure to track the usage of your reactions as you only get one of each.
- At the start of each round for Valtor:
 1. Use Arcane Resistance to remove the most dangerous condition or spell.
 2. Roll a d6 to recharge Arcane Smite if applicable.

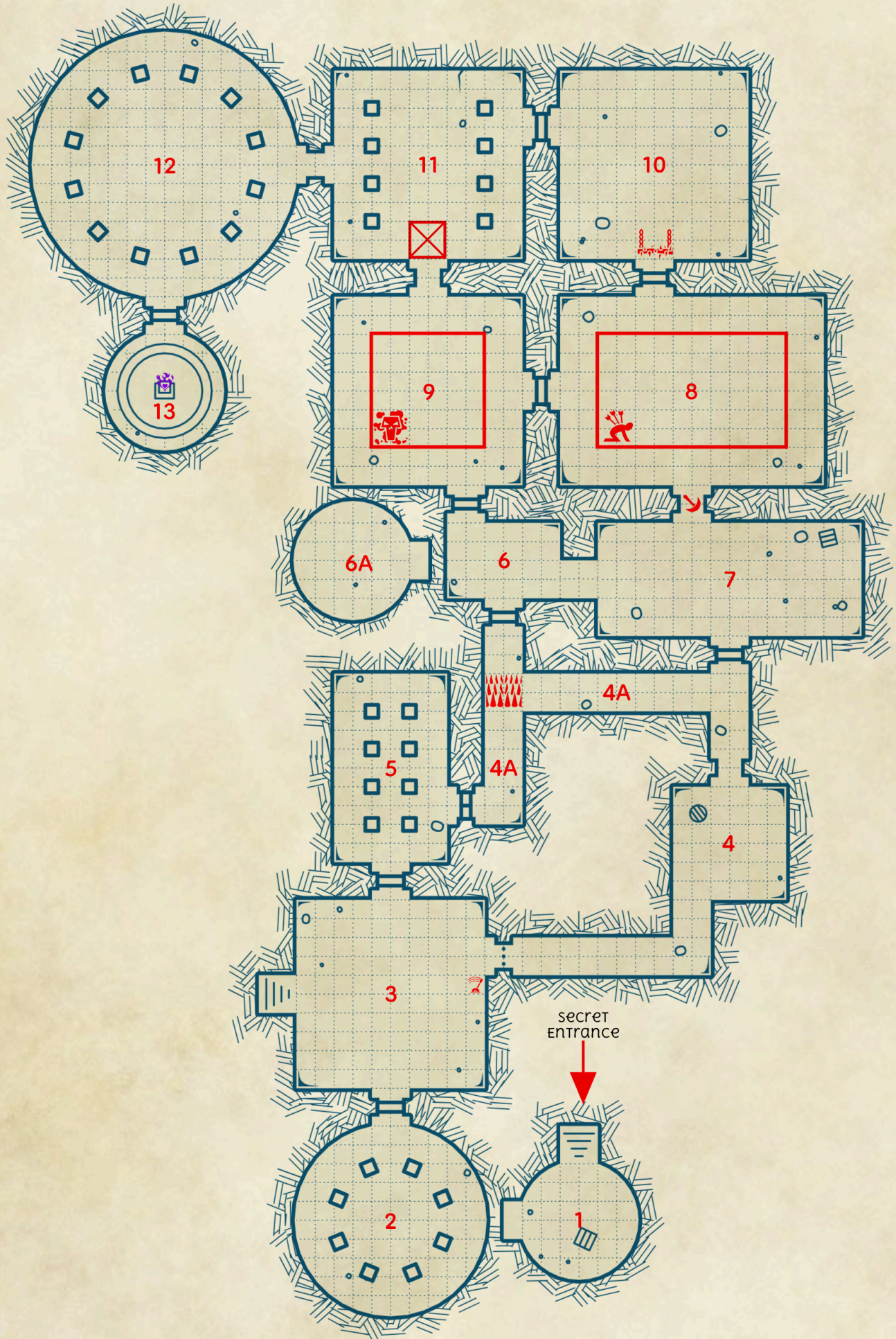
AFTER THE FIGHT

Assuming the players win, let them roleplay what they want to do with the Heart of Noctis.

- If they decide to destroy it:
 - *"As the Heart shatters, you feel a tension around you dissipate, a tension you never even noticed. You breathe a little easier..."*
- If they decide to cleanse it and use it:
 - *"A slow but clear feeling starts emanating from the Heart, counteracting Valtor's influence and cleansing the world around you..."*
- If they decide to use it as is:
 - *"You hear a whisper in your mind, telling you that you can have whatever you desire; you just need to give in to it..."*
- If they can't decide, fade to black:
 - *"We leave our heroes as they try to decide what should be done..."*

If there is a TPK (Total Party Kill), describe them being sucked into the Heart of Noctis. Then give a brief cutaway to the various factions the players were a part of, showing them coming up with a new plan to take Valtor down.





ACKNOWLEDGMENTS, CREDITS AND DISCLAIMERS

CREDITS

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- Made with [The Homebrewery](#)
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- Map created in [One Page Dungeon by watabou](#)

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